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ABSTRACT

In English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), there is renewed interest in use of literature in the communicative classroom. Literature may be part of a communicative pedagogy in three ways: (1) by providing a context in which to develop students' reading strategies and knowledge of non-fiction and literary texts; (2) by being the basis of an extensive reading program, with attendant acquisition of new vocabulary and grammatical forms; and (3) by offering the opportunity to explore cross-cultural values. One reading strategy found useful for encouraging reading is the exploration of story grammar, which provides common terms of reference and a direction for group discussion. As students learn about story grammar and understand how to apply it to stories they are reading, an extensive reading program should be undertaken, with students selecting their own reading materials from a classroom shelf or from a self-access area in the library. Related classroom activities include discussions, book reports, teacher book presentations, small-group book sharing, and sustained silent reading periods. Book content, including cultural and thematic information, can be used for a variety of language and cultural learning activities (such as cloze procedures), timeline construction, and response to specific passages or events. Contains 22 references. (MSE)

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Using Literature for Language Teaching in ESOL

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Using Literature for Language Teaching in ESOL

Gregory Strong

Using literature to teach language is the basis of the classical approach to language instruction which emphasizes translation activities. In the field of English as an additional language (ESOL), there has been renewed interest in the use of literature in the communicative classroom.

This has been due to a variety of factors. In the first place, over the last 30 years, there has been a shift in the paradigm of language teaching. The audiolingual approach which focused on listening and speaking activities has given way to a communicative one seeking to develop all four language skills. In addition, the communicative pedagogy centres upon classroom activities with student interactions in pairs and small groups that exchange information, engage in problem-solving, and make judgements and decisions (Ellis, 1982). These activities can be readily adapted to the study of literature. Finally, numerous researchers (Carrel, 1989; Lynch & Hudson, 1991; Krashen, 1993) have reasserted the importance of reading in a communicative classroom.

Literature may form part of a communicative pedagogy in three different ways. One way is in providing a context in which to develop students' reading strategies and knowledge of non-fiction and literary texts. Secondly, literature can form the basis of an extensive reading program with the attendant acquisition of new vocabulary as well as grammatical forms. Extensive reading of literature can encourage students to develop positive attitudes towards reading. These benefits are achieved through providing students with a large selec-

tion of high interest books and allowing them free choice. In addition, the study of literature can provide the content of classroom language learning. A last benefit of the study of literature is that it offers the opportunity to explore cross-cultural values.

For the most part, research into student use of reading strategies has been into their application to various types of expository prose, said to be representative of the academic reading found in textbooks and university courses. Effective strategies include using background knowledge, predicting content and then sampling the text, scanning it for details such as numbers and dates, and skimming texts for main ideas. Significant gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and knowledge of grammar have been reported, particularly in texts organized around the principles of analysis, comparison and contrast, and argument (Levine & Reves, 1994; Shih, 1992).

It is more difficult to teach students how to use a strategy for reading literary texts. The skills in analyzing literature are not explicit ones nor is there much potential for developing a simple process of analysis. Gajdusek (1988) notes that the contextualizing devices in expository prose such as introductions, transitions made in words and phrases, and even complex grammar are far less explicit in literature (p. 230). However, these same difficulties in reading literary texts may provide rich material for students acquiring a knowledge of a foreign language. Widdowson (1975) argues that literary texts offer a unique advantage over non-fiction ones because the former rely so heavily upon the reader's interpretation: a literary work is "separate, self-contained" with its language fashioned into "patterns of recurring sounds, structures and meanings" on symbolic and thematic levels (p. 36). Whether or not literary texts are better than non-fiction ones for the purposes of language study, they remain the more difficult of the two types.

1. Story Grammar as a Reading Strategy

Although literary texts are more difficult to read than non-fiction ones, one strategy which has been used with some success is story grammar. The idea of story grammar evolved from the work of cognitive psychologists and anthropologists who found that regardless of age or culture, individuals tell stories using such essential elements as a character, a conflict, a series of incidents, their resolution, and a thematic analysis. In a survey of the research, Dimino, Taylor, and Gersten (1995) found that story grammar was effective in improving the reading comprehension of LI students who are poor readers, or have learning disabilities.

Besides assisting students in comprehending literature, story grammar can provide the nucleus of a small group discussion. It supplies students with common terms of reference and offers a direction for their discussion of fiction. By learning how to read fiction through employing story grammar, students can begin to interpret literature independently of their teachers.

One story grammar is based on the kind of literary terms described by Beckson and Ganz (1987). The students need to learn the terms thoroughly before they can successfully use the strategy, to read stories and discuss them with other students. They have to learn the differences between (1) setting, (2) point of view, (3) conflict, (4) symbol, (5) irony, (6) theme (See Fig. 1).

1. **Setting:** the time and location of a story, or novel

2. **Point of View:** a story is told from one point of view:
   a) first person; sympathetic, unreliable,
   b) third person; factual, little insight into characters' minds and emotions
   c) omniscient, insight into the minds and emotions of many characters

3. **Conflict:** a character is in conflict with himself, or herself, or with someone else:
   a) man or woman versus man or woman
   b) man or woman versus himself or herself
   c) man or woman versus his or her environment

4. **Symbol:** a thing which stands for another thing, a person, or idea

5. **Irony:** whenever something happens in a story that is unexpected and yet appropriate

6. **Theme:** the main idea, a moral or a lesson

Fig. 1 Literary Terms

They also need practice in applying the literary terms to stories. Again, this should be done through small group work followed by whole class discussion

2. Extensive Reading and Self-Access Books

As students learn a story grammar and understand how to apply it to the stories they are reading, an extensive reading program should be undertaken in class. This is another very effective use of literature in a language class.

Instead of being provided a class text, students select their own reading material from either a classroom bookshelf and display or from a self-access area of the library. Because students choose books suited to their interests, they will have greater enjoyment of what they are reading and they can use the story grammar reading strategy as a tool to help them discuss their books.

Research indicates that extensive reading programs improve student language abilities (Elley, 1991; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Hafiz & Tudor, 1990). Elley (Ibid) noted that by immersion in meaningful and interesting texts, and subsequent small group discussion of books over a school year, school children made more significant

gains in reading comprehension, word recognition, grammatical knowledge and even oral fluency over children taught by approaches such as the audiolingual method of language instruction. Hafiz and Tudor (1989) made over 100 graded English readers available to a small number of ESL students in the U.K. and after 60 hours of reading and discussions, found a marked improvement in their writing and in their attitudes toward reading. Hafiz and Tudor (1990) used graded readers with a class of EFL students in Pakistan over 90 hours over a 23-week period and found very significant gains in the fluency and accuracy of their writing.

An extensive reading program with graded readers is suitable for students of different abilities. Many EFL publishers maintain collections of attractively-packaged graded readers and abridged classics. These range in size from about 80 to 300 pages and in difficulty from basic readers to those for students with native-reader abilities. Currently, the company with the most effective series of graded readers is likely Heinemann which sets guidelines for its writers so that the information and grammatical structures in their books are controlled. For example, at the beginner level, (which is the second of five different level), their readers consist of only of 600 words, including present and past tenses, continuous tenses, and the modals "can" and "have" and simple and compound sentences (Toth, 1993, p. 13). In contrast, at the Intermediate Level, the fourth level, there is a use of the perfect continuous tenses, verb-infinitives, and complex sentences with embedded clauses (Ibid, p. 13).

Each publisher will indicate ability levels for their readers, but as these differ, a teacher setting up a self-access program will need a system to identify the books for students. In the Integrated English program in the English Department of Aoyama Gakuin University, an area of the library at the Atsugi campus has been set aside for nearly 2,000 self-access books for about 400 students. The books have been sorted into three different stages roughly corresponding to

books of 800 to 1,000 words for Stage I, with Stage II for books of 1000 to 2,000 words, and Stage III for books with 2,000 words or more, many of which will be of abridged classics such as Emily Brontë *Wuthering Heights* (1993, rev. ed., Longman, Singapore), abridged popular novels John Grisham *The Pelican Brief* (1992, rev. ed., Penguin Books, London) and unabridged novels based on Films, or on popular TV programs such as "The X-files", Charles Grant *Whirlwind* (1995, Harper Collins, New York).

Besides discussions and perhaps written reports on books through using a story grammar, there are other possible activities. One is to encourage positive reading behaviours through "Booktalks" where the teacher holds up the book, displaying its illustrated cover and speaks for two or three minutes about the characters in the story, and hints at the books's plot. The idea is to present just enough information to interest potential readers. In groups, students could participate in a "Circle Share" where students tell a bit about their novels to the members of their group. Finally, a short period of "Sustained Silent Reading" (SSR) where both students and teachers read their own books silently and fluently for 20 to 50 minutes is a good way to introduce the idea of fluent reading to students and this SSR period might be repeated over the school term. In this case, the rationale for the in-class reading should be carefully explained to students as well as the notion that they must read without resort to their dictionaries.

3. The Class Novel

Besides strategy teaching and extensive reading, a final use of literature in the communicative classroom is in using it as the content of language teaching activities. Diagramming the structure of a story or novel, reviewing the characters and events in it, notetaking, summarizing, and paragraph writing are not only useful in explicating the literary text for students, but also offer potential for language learning. Gajdusek (1988) outlines a four-level sequence of (1) pre-reading

activities, (2) factual in-class work, (3) analysis, (4) extension activities. (p. 233) The division may be useful in discussing some of the language-based activities that might be employed by a teacher whose class is studying the Amy Tan novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989, G. Putnam's Sons, New York).

3.1. Pre-Reading Activities

Prereading activities for a novel such as *The Joy Luck Club* could introduce essential cultural or thematic information. Initially, the teacher might introduce the material through a scanning activity. Besides providing students with essential information about the publication, these questions could introduce the main characters in the book and suggest the theme. (See Fig. 2).

The Joy Luck Club
1. When was it printed?
2. How many pages are there?
3. What are the names of the 4 daughters?
4. What are the titles of the 2 shortest chapters?
5. To whom is the book dedicated?
6. What are the names of the 4 mothers?
7. Where was the book printed?
8. What is the title of the longest chapter?
9. How many times is the word "Chinese" used on page _____?

Fig. 2 A Scanning Activity for The Joy Luck Club

Next, in terms of vocabulary, the teacher should think of it as being partially inessential, partially comprehensible through sentence and paragraph contexts, and partially made of key words which are essential to the story and would be easy for native speakers to understand, but not necessarily EFL students. The vocabulary which can be derived from context clues might be presented to the class in a cloze-type exercise.

As I remember it, the __1__ side of my mother sprang from the __2__ in our old house in Oakland. I was five and mother tried to __3__ it from me. She __4__ the door with a wooden chair, __5__ it with a chain and two types of key locks. And when it became so __6__ that I spent all my energies __7__ this door, until the day I was finally able to __8__ it open with my small fingers only to immediately fall __9__ into the dark __10__. And it was only after I stopped screaming — I had seen the __11__ of my nose on my mother's shoulder — only then did my mother tell me about the bad __12__ who lived in the basement and why I should never open the door again, (p. 103).

Fig. 3 A Clozed Passage

This is one of the early paragraphs in the chapter "The Voice from the Wall" and it illustrates how cloze technique could be used with essential vocabulary and context clues. In addition, the first blank about the "dark" side of the narrator's mother could be discussed in detail in class because the idea that the narrator's mother is unbalanced and has a "dark side" is central to understanding the story. Obviously, the teacher might have to explain that Oakland is a district of the city of Los Angeles. The same is true of a culturally-embedded word such as "the basement" of a house.

A final pre-writing activity might be to involve students in a "focus write" about a problem or situation in a story. The previous paragraph from Amy Tan's novel is from a chapter where a girl realizes that her mother suffers from mental illness. Before students read the chapter, the teacher might ask them to respond to the question "What would you do if you found out your mother was suffering from mental illness?" The students' responses would be discussed. As a result of doing these activities, students would be better prepared for their reading later.

3. 2. Factual In-Class Work

Key events and sequences of events in a novel are an important

part of comprehension. The use of a timeline in classroom discussions is a helpful way to clarify these. The events depicted on the timeline could be printed in a scrambled order to promote more discussion among the students.

The following figure shows a timetable based on the events in the chapter "Half and Half" in *The Joy Luck Club*.

Events:

a) ____ An-mei puts the Bible under the table leg.
b) ____ Ted and Rose marry.
c) ____ An-mei carries a Bible.
d) ____ Bing drowns in the sea.
e) ____ The Hsu family go to the beach.
f) ____ Mrs. Jordan thinks Rose is Vietnamese.
g) ____ Ted and Rose meet at Berkley.
h) ____ Ted leaves Rose.

Fig. 3 A Timeline of Events in "Half and Half"

Another type of factual work might involve visualizing certain descriptive passages in the text as an aid to comprehension. In this case, students would read a passage (such as the one in Fig. 3) and attempt to draw either the basement or the layout of the house.

3. 3. Analysis

One on-going type of analysis while the class is reading the novel is the use of student journals and dialectical or double entry (Berthoff, 1981). Students choose passages from the novel that they find personally significant and they copy these down into the left-hand side of a page in their notebooks. In the right-hand side, they note their emotional and intellectual responses to the passages. This process encourages students to interpret their reading in terms of their own experiences and it helps them to become more actively engaged with what they are reading. In addition, these journals can

be circulated among class members. In this way, students will be able to understand more of the themes and implications of what they are reading.

Furthermore, they could analyze the personalities of the characters in a novel. This could be done using a grid. Eventually it could form the basis of a character sketch or a paragraph contrasting two characters. (Fig. 4).

Type of Behaviour	Su Yuan Woo	Lindo Jong	An-Mei Hsu	Ying Ying St. Clair
1. proud	"I knew my mother resented . . . she had nothing to come back with" (p. 37)			
2. unbalanced				"I could sense the unspoken terrors . . . that chased my mother . . ." (p. 103)
3. competitive		"Auntie Lindo and my mother were both best friends and enemies . . ." (p. 37)		
4. naive			"Auntie An-mei and Uncle George were shaken down . . ." (p. 36)	

Fig. 4 A Character Grid

3. 4. Extension Activities

Finally, extension activities with a novel might include periodic reviews of the material and the use of the novel to create role plays and different types of writing activities. For one thing, students might review the characters in the novel by an information gap activ-

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ity called "Who Am I?" where the students question one another about characters in the novel. The teacher puts the names of the characters in the novel on pieces of paper. Randomly, the students draw these papers but do not look at them The papers are taped to their backs. The class mingles at the front of the room and each student asks a second student the questions that will enable the first student to guess whom the second student is supposed to be. Each person can only be asked a single question at a time. Someone who had the character name "June Woo" on her back might ask other students these sorts of questions — "Am I a woman? Am I a young woman? Do I live in America? Do I hate playing the piano?" — until the student could guess her identity.

Another kind of extension activity might be to create a Japanese tanka, a poem which consists of five lines of 31 syllables in a sequence of five, seven, five, seven, and seven. The poem should reflect the theme and events of the story in a sensuous, imagistic way as in the following example from "The Red Candle" chapter in *The Joy Luck Club.*

The Red Candle

Little girl's red kite
Sharing her mother's rice bowl
Storm at the wedding
Wind fluttering red candle
Wart on her husband's bare back

Fig. 5 A Tanka on "The Red Candle"

There are many other potential activities. A good activity to encourage students to think along thematic lines is to have them either match potential chapter titles with a brief summary of the chapter, or try to predict which events might occur in a particular chapter.

Another activity on the theme is a "Pyramid Discussion" where the teacher prepares a list of statements about the theme, including opinions, and cliches, and incorrect information and gives it to students. Initially, each student ranks the thematic statements in order of their accuracy. Next, students form pairs and in order to successfully rank the statements, they must listen to one another's arguments and agree on a single order. Then they form groups of four to determine a new ranking (Fig. 6) and afterward, they do the same thing in a larger group, one of eight. This is "the pyramid".

1. ____ "Two Kinds" is a story about two kinds of love: a mother's love and a daughter's love.
2. ____ "Two Kinds" is about two places: America and China.
3. ____ "Two Kinds" presents June's past and her present and how these times influenced her personality.
4. ____ "Perfectly Contented" and "Pleading Child" were parts of the same song; June's childhood struggle with her mother ended with her mother accepting her as an adult.
5. ____ This is a story about two kinds of children: a talented one such as Waverly Jong and a less talented one, June Woo.
6. ____ There are two kinds of daughters: the obedient kind and the other kind. Only one kind could live in the Woo house.
7. ____ There are two kinds of piano playing in "Two Kinds," one is good playing and the other is not, just like there are two kinds of lives: one, good; the other, not.
8. ____ Two kinds of emotions are found in every person, happiness, and sadness and this is the case with June and her mother.

Fig. 6 A Pyramid Discussion on the story "Two kinds"

At the end of the novel, or chapter, there are many possibilities for summary work. Students might be given an incorrect summary of events to correct. They might do a role play of a conversation in the

text. Group presentations might be organized on themes in the novel, and of course, essays could be assigned as well.

4. Cross-Cultural Values in Literature

There is a final consideration in the use of literature in English teaching. Studying literature from another culture gives students insight into the customs and values of other places. It can become a powerful tool in teaching the relativity of cultural values and the inherent problems in cross-cultural communication. To start, there is often a kind of cultural dissonance. Gadjusek (1988) describes how "writers assume that their readers share with them similar cultural experience, similar cultural knowledge and assumptions" and "will draw upon their own experience and background" to interpret what they read (p. 232). Therefore, a reader's values will frequently conflict with those of a writer from another culture.

One of the best known examples of this cultural dissonance occurred when an anthropologist attempted to retell the story of Hamlet to a West African tribe, the Tiv (Bohannan, 1980). Although the titles and situations of Shakespeare's tragedy had been translated for the tribe, the elders could not understand Hamlet's motivations. They felt that his father age-mates should have revenged his murder, not Hamlet and that therefore Hamlet, and Ophelia, for that matter, were possessed by witches:

> It is clear the elders of your country have never told you what the story really means . . . We believe you when you say your marriage customs are different, or your clothes, or your weapons. But people are the same everywhere: therefore there are witches, and it is we, the elders, who know how witches work. (Ibid, p. 358)

It is in the discovery of these different values that greater understanding grows of another culture as well as awareness of one's own culturally-bound values. Oster (1989) writes of how short texts told from a single, limited perspective can be very effective in demon-

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strating the values held in different cultures and how this is the initial step in students examining their own cultural biases.

Altogether, literature should form an important part of any language teaching class. It offers excellent scope for learning reading strategies. In addition, it can form the basis for a self-access, extensive reading program with many benefits in language acquisition. If class readers are being used, then there are many potential language-based activities. Lastly, reading literature in class can provide a venue to explore the different customs and values elsewhere in the the World.

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